



Statement for the record of the

**NATIONAL COALITION**  
*for* **HOMELESS VETERANS**

United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Veterans' Affairs

" COVID-19 Supplemental Funding Hearing: Did It  
Protect and Improve Veteran Care?"

May 23, 2023

Chairman Bost, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished Members of the Committee:

In the United States there is broad bipartisan agreement that no man or woman who has sacrificed for and served our country should struggle to meet their basic needs. Despite this, over 33,000 veterans experience homelessness on any given night. The Department of Veterans' Affairs' (VA) continuing ability to provide services to these vulnerable veterans expired on May 11th with the end of the Public Health Emergency (PHE).

Since 2009, the United States has cut the number of veterans experiencing homelessness on any given night by over half; we know what works and what more is needed to cross the finish line. Congress in its wisdom enacted provisions into law to enable VA to better serve veterans, albeit during a time of national emergency. The initial feedback from this response shows certain measures were incredibly effective. Last year alone, VA worked with communities to help more than 40,000 veterans out of homelessness and into the safe, stable homes that they deserve," said VA Secretary McDonough. "We know that it's possible to end homelessness because we are making real progress every day..." We know that while the community at large was unable to keep up with the pace of homelessness over the course of the PHE, VA and the homeless veteran community of providers were able to reduce veteran homelessness by 11% from 2020-2022.

The bipartisan *Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020* (P.L. 116-315) strengthened programs that emphasize permanent solutions to housing instability and homelessness among veterans. Section 4201 of P.L. 116-315, also known as Isakson/Roe, is an effective authority that must be maintained since as a VA official recently testified, "we will not eliminate veteran homelessness without these additional authorities." As knowledge of VA's new authorities spread and implementation improved, the number of veterans VA has been able to assist has skyrocketed. Whereas VA was able to help 32,000 veterans with just Section 4201 authorities alone in 2022, these authorities supported over 7,000 veterans in one month this year.

A quick real-life example that utilizes multiple authorities such as access to hotels, rideshares, and phones. A female veteran was able to be placed in a hotel in the rural town where she was seeking permanent housing and had no access to shelters there. With the stability in the hotel, she was able to engage in substance abuse treatment and mental health care at the VA super Community Based Outpatient Center or CBOC. rideshare transported her to these appointments until she was

housed in HUD/VASH supportive housing. Without 4201 she would not have had the opportunity to attain stability and the likelihood of her following through with substance and mental health care was slim. In addition, the very rural area of Southeast Missouri has zero public transportation. The rideshare provided a lifeline to their homeless population. The veteran was provided with a cell phone, which made all this possible through the ability to contact her.

There are thousands of stories just like this veterans', and NCHV takes this opportunity to lift up the legislation introduced in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress that is attempting to rectify the loss of these commonsense authorities:

**H.R. 645** the *Healthy Foundations for Homeless Veterans Act* Veterans are better able to get to appointments, access their supportive services, have access to necessities as well as be contacted facilitating access to telehealth services in remote locations. Using section 4201 authority under Isakson/Roe, VAMCs provided additional services ranging from items like tents and food, to communications, and transportation in the form of bikes and ride shares for tens of thousands of veterans during the public health emergency. The bill was also referred with bipartisan support by voice vote in the House Veterans Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity.

We also highlight the *Return Home to Housing Act* or **H.R. 491**, a bill that would adjust the maximum reimbursement rate for VA grantees for shelter, clinical services, and essential sustenance for veterans, as the daily amount available for reimbursement has dropped over 60% to \$64.52 a day. The increased financial burden of prioritizing COVID safety measures paired with ongoing operating and maintenance costs makes these programs unsustainable at this level and may leave grantees with no option but to discontinue providing these essential services altogether.

Service providers are being forced to make tough financial decision others have related to prioritizing health safety measures at a financial loss. Limits are being put on essential services for veterans such as meals, wrap around services, beds, facility security and some are having to make the decision to maintain staff. NCHV has seen providers pleading with their representatives explaining how letting these authorities' sunset was essentially cutting their access to funds to assist veterans by over \$60,000 a month. Every veteran deserves access to safe shelter and housing, whether they are currently experiencing homelessness or are facing housing-associated costs that put them at risk of homelessness.

The proposals in these two bills are included in the recently introduced **S.1436** – the *Critical Health Access Resource and Grant Extensions (CHARGE) Act of 2023*.

This legislation would extend successful, essential veterans' programs and authorities from the last few years that expired May 11th. The bill includes extensions of critical provisions related not only to homelessness but health care access, caregivers, and State Veterans Homes as well:

- Increases the maximum reimbursement amount for grantees receiving funds from VA to provide temporary housing for homeless veterans. Without this provision, most of these programs, especially in rural and isolated areas with minimal financial support alternatives, are being forced to reduce services, beds, and even cease their programs due to the limitation on reimbursement amounts.
- Allows VA to continue providing gap services and support to homeless veterans in circumstances where other support is not available, including providing necessary personal and hygiene items, transportation services, food, landlord incentives for housing homeless veterans, and more.
- Extends authority to allow veterans and caregivers to elect for virtual home visits through September 30, 2023, or until VA finalizes their new regulations for the Caregivers program.
- Extends the State Veterans Homes' occupancy rate requirement waiver until September 30, 2023, so that state homes are not financially penalized for staffing shortages.
- Makes permanent an authority that allows VA to share PPE, vaccines, medical supplies, and other resources with State Veterans Homes.

As you consider further oversight in the 118th Congress, the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) asks you to look at how VA is forced to compensate in lieu of passing the Critical Health Access Resource and Grant Extensions (CHARGE) Act of 2023 (S.1436), the Healthy Foundations for Homeless Veterans Act (H.R.645) which has already been reported favorably out of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, and the Return Home to Housing Act (H.R. 491).

All three pieces of legislation are a testament to the dedication and challenging work of communities nationwide, and the responsiveness and bipartisanship of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs, its Members, and their dedicated staff. We are committed to working with Congress and our partners across the country to end homelessness among veterans, and passage of H.R 645, H.R. 491, and S.1436 will be crucial in this endeavor. Thank you in advance for your consideration and support.

Very respectfully,

The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans